

Chapter 1 – The Beginning

Life is a wild ride, and mine was no exception. It taught me early on that fairness was a fleeting illusion, and challenges were always lurking around the corner, ready to pounce when you least expected it. But one thing I've learned is that family doesn't always come in the conventional package; sometimes, they arrive when you least expect it.

I was raised by my biological mom and my adopted father, Chris, who I'll be referring to as my dad throughout my recollection of this story. While some kids had a clear picture of their biological fathers, mine remained somewhat of a mystery. He wasn't a significant part of my life, and the real father figure was Chris, who stepped in with unconditional love and care.

The story of my biological father, Kyle, began in the 90s when he met my aunt, Kari, at a bowling alley near their high school. From what I'm told, he was instantly drawn to her and made Kari feel awkward. When my mom, Kacy, confronted him about making her sister uncomfortable, she left a lasting impression on him.

Kyle couldn't shake the memory of that bold and outspoken woman, and he soon developed a deep interest in my mom. Despite the age difference, their connection was undeniable, and they started dating

while they were both still in high school. Kyle was smitten, and he couldn't help but talk about her all the time to his friends.

However, beneath the surface of their love story lurked a darker side. Kyle was involved in a life of petty crime, partnering with a friend named Rick in a string of illegal activities. Stealing cars, gambling, and burglarizing houses were all part of their alleged hobbies, with Kyle as the “mastermind.”

Despite Kyle's shady past, their love seemed genuine at the time. But life's storm was brewing, and soon, their lives were entangled in a web of challenges and uncertainties that put them to the test.

My mom learned about my father's crimes when Kyle's friend, James, disclosed the information to her, and the major revelation occurred when he was arrested at my mom's house. Needless to say, she was not pleased – who would be?

My mom was a woman who cared deeply about her reputation, as most people do. She had been a star athlete at her school and was well-known. Excelling in everything she tried, except basketball, which she despised due to all the running.

One night, Kyle stayed over at Rick's house along with Rick, Rick's girlfriend, Mandy, and Mandy's friend whose name I couldn't find. Mandy supposedly had her eyes set on Kyle for some time, and in the

stillness of the night, when everyone was asleep, Mandy approached Kyle in the living room, and one thing led to another.

Filled with guilt, Kyle couldn't bear the weight of what he had done. He hurriedly left the house and returned home to his mom's. There, he showered, cried, and berated himself for betraying his friend and his own girlfriend by sleeping with his best friend's girl.

My mom observed a change in Kyle's behavior, and after about a week, she discovered the truth about his infidelity with Mandy. Fuming with anger and disappointment, they had a heated argument that ultimately led to their breakup.

Over the next week, my mom put Kyle through the wringer, making his life miserable from his account. This culminated in a physical altercation in the alley behind her parents' house, where she ended up kneeling him in the groin and slapping him across the face. Their relationship became a rollercoaster of constant arguments, breakups/makeups, and a lack of trust.

During one of their breaks, approximately a year later, my mom and Rick happened to cross paths at a party. My mom, drunk, and Rick, still harboring resentment toward Kyle, had a what has been described to me as an unfortunate encounter. My

mom didn't share any further details of that night, possibly because she didn't want to or because her intoxication made it hard to recall. Only my mom's friend knew about her involvement with Rick, and even that remains unconfirmed.

After that party, my mom and Kyle decided to work through their issues. They had heartfelt conversations, and ultimately, my mom chose to give him another chance, and they were able to reconcile. Around two months after getting back together, my mom discovered she was pregnant with me, and she was just nineteen at the time. Both of them were filled with a mix of excitement and fear as they prepared to welcome a new life into the world together.

My mom wanted Kyle to step up and be responsible, just like she was trying to be. It was challenging for her to bear the weight of all the responsibilities that he should have been sharing. She invested a lot of effort into helping him become a better person, partner, and future father.

In an effort to motivate him, my mom gave Kyle an ultimatum – he had to complete his high school education if he wanted to live with her. Unfortunately, he kept betraying her trust. He would lie about attending school while engaging in shady activities like playing penny poker or stealing cars. It seemed like he might be back-sliding into his old ways, which was heartbreaking for my mom as things didn't turn

out the way she was hoping. At the time of my birth, my mom was just 19 years old, and my grandparents and aunt stepped in to support her like most families would. They visited every day, helping with household chores and laundry, making sure we had food, and giving my mom much-needed company since her main companion was just me, a baby.

Despite their help, my mom made the difficult decision to stop allowing Kyle to live with her shortly after I was born. His continuous lying and ditching school, coupled with my mom's post-C-section recovery, made it clear that he wasn't ready for the responsibilities of fatherhood.

As my mom began to recover and regain mobility after a few weeks, her investigative nature emerged. She frequently caught Kyle in lies, using her car's odometer to verify his whereabouts when he claimed to be at school. His explanations didn't match the mileage, often revealing that he was either playing poker with friends or avoiding his responsibilities altogether. This pattern of behavior continued for about two weeks, leading my mom to realize that he was not only neglecting her but also abandoning his role as a father, which she found unforgivable. Putting two and two together, my mom knew she had to move on and end the relationship.

Thus, when I was one month old, they decided to part ways again, once and for all.

After about a year of split, my biological father, Kyle, got caught by the police and sentenced to prison for 12 years. During this time, my mom met the man who would eventually become my dad.

During the first year of his imprisonment, Kyle would send letters to my mom and me, primarily on major holidays, but gradually, the frequency reduced to about once a month. As I grew older and read through a few of his letters, I couldn't help but cringe at the numerous grammatical mistakes and lack of proper punctuation and spelling. It was evident that his decision to ditch school and engage in illegal activities had left him ill-equipped academically.

On the other hand, my adoptive father, Chris, took a different path after high school. He enlisted in the Marines as a helicopter mechanic, serving for six years. During his time at tech school in NAS Millington, he met his first wife, Kelly, who gave him his first non-biological child, my step-sister Jessica. Unfortunately, their marriage faced challenges when she cheated on him during his deployments, ultimately leading to their divorce.

My dad was the oldest of three brothers. One of his brothers became a Deputy Sheriff in Nevada, while the youngest brother owns a Graphic Design Studio in Nevada. Chris himself went on to establish a small HVAC company. He was born in California but grew up in Arizona with his mom, who was originally from

Oklahoma. However, he still doesn't speak much about his background or upbringing. When Chris first crossed paths with my mom in 1992, he was 24 years old, and she was 20. They met at a daytime wedding. Despite feeling like he hadn't gathered enough 'liquid courage' yet, Chris was captivated by my mom's beauty as he saw her heading toward the exit after the ceremony. Buzzed and unsure of how to approach her, he enlisted the help of his youngest brother to get her number. His brother went up to my mom and managed to get her number for him, kicking off the beginning of their love story.

After a day or two of waiting, Chris mustered the courage to call and ask my mom out on a date. They decided to have brunch at a vegan restaurant, which was a refreshing change for her after enduring a destructive and toxic relationship with my biological father, Kyle. To avoid scaring Chris away on their first date, my mom chose not to reveal my identity just yet. She wanted to get to know him better and have a few more dates before disclosing the fact that she had a newborn son.

During their brunch conversation, my mom playfully teased Chris for not having the guts to approach her directly. To get to know him better, she asked about his birthday, not anticipating that her own revelation was just around the corner. Chris responded that his birthday was on February 13th.

This coincidentally happened to be the same day as my own birthday, which my mom couldn't resist mentioning.

Her confession surprised Chris, and my mom worried that it might end their relationship before it could ever start. However, he remained calm and asked questions about me. Learning that she was a mom, Chris asked about my age. My mom, feeling a bit unsure, revealed that I was six months old. Despite the unexpected news, the date went well.

After the brunch, Chris dropped my mom off at home, and they continued to go on more dates. Eventually, he asked her if she wanted to bring me along, given my mom had told him I was a really well-behaved baby. However, on the day of that crucial date, things took an unexpected turn—I was crying and screaming, completely embarrassing my mom in front of him and all the other customers at the restaurant. But Chris took it in stride, laughing and showing his willingness to stay and help.

From that point on, I have been told many stories of going out with my mom and dad.

The years passed swiftly, and throughout all their ups and downs, Chris remained a constant in my life. He continued to be there for me in every way, picking me up from school, attending all my events, and offering support whenever I needed it.

INCONCEIVABLE TRUTHS

Right from the beginning, I knew that Chris was not my biological father. My parents were always open and honest with me, and I embraced the truth with understanding for the most part. Chris may not have been my birth father, but he was my dad in every sense of the word. His love transcended any blood connection, and I felt blessed to have him as a guiding force in my life.

As my mom and Chris's relationship blossomed, they moved in together after dating for a year or two. Their love story culminated in a joyful and planned wedding in Vegas, surrounded by close friends and family. I was only six at the time, and little did I know that this happy marriage would endure for 25 years and counting.

Two years into their marriage, I had the emotional experience of being officially adopted by Chris. The day is etched in my memory as if it happened just yesterday. Sitting in front of the judge alongside my mom and Chris, my heart was filled with love and excitement. My mom, with her eyes filled with pride, told me that I could change my name to any name I desired.

As an eight-year-old, the prospect of choosing my own name was both exciting and intimidating. But my love for Chris was so profound that I yearned to be a part of him in every way possible. With tears in his eyes, he listened as I requested to be named 'Christopher Gilmore the Second' after him. However, my mom laughed affectionately, and my request to take on his full name as a junior was met with gentle refusal. Nonetheless, my

name ended up as Cody Gilmore, but it didn't change the profound impact of this beautiful moment. I truly do tear up just thinking about that day.

The adoption holds immense significance to me beyond mere legalities. It symbolizes the boundless love and commitment Chris has shown me as his adoptive son. His sacrifices and dedication have paved the way for the opportunities and support I have received throughout my life. In my eyes, he is the greatest man, a true father who raised me with unconditional love and care.

The love and admiration I feel for my dad are beyond words. I remain in awe of the man he is and the profound impact he has had on shaping the person I am today. I am forever grateful for his love, guidance, and presence in my life. I eagerly look forward to the continued journey with him as my rock. This chapter may have come to a close, but the story of our family's love and strength is just beginning.